



Press Release

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

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www.socialsecurity.gov/oig

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Houston-Area Company Penalized \$325,000 for Operating Misleading Social Security-Related Websites

Websites enticed visitors to pay for form SSA offers free of charge

Net Forms, LLC, of Stafford, Texas, has agreed to pay a \$325,000 civil monetary penalty to the Social Security Administration (SSA) and discontinue operating Websites designed to entice members of the public to pay a fee for SSA's *Application for a Social Security Card* ("Form SS-5") that SSA offers free of charge, SSA Inspector General Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr. announced.

The successful resolution of the case was the result of a joint effort between the SSA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and the U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of Texas, José Angel Moreno, U.S. Attorney.

The Government filed a civil action in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas, charging that the Websites violated Section 1140 of the *Social Security Act* for their use of SSA's words, letters, symbols, and emblems in a manner that gave the false impression that SSA approved, endorsed, or authorized the Websites. The Government further charged that operation of the Websites violated provisions of Section 1140 related to the fee-based reproduction or distribution of an SSA form or publication, as well as provisions related to providing fee-based assistance to individuals in obtaining a product or service that SSA provided free of charge.

The Website operators contracted with Internet search companies to ensure that online searches for terms related to obtaining a new or replacement Social Security Card would direct potential customers to the Websites. Thousands of individuals viewed the Websites, and Net Forms, LLC accumulated significant revenues from its sale of the SSA form. Fees for the form reached as high as \$29.99, plus an additional \$9.99 fee for an automatically renewable annual membership fee to a forms database also operated by Net Forms, LLC.

SSA provides the Form SS-5 at no cost on its Website, www.socialsecurity.gov, as well as at all SSA field offices and other SSA-approved locations throughout the nation.

For more information, please contact Jonathan Lasher, OIG's Assistant Inspector General for External Relations, at 410-965-7178.